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OF SHARKS AND CUBANS

Trevor Burns'
Odyssey Ends

BY STAN REDDING

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Trevor Burns finally made it to Houston Saturday.

And it surprised the heck out of him. He hadn't thought he'd make it.

To get here, Burns had abandoned an aircraft in the Caribbean, swum for 28 hours, fought off sharks, convinced Fidel Castro he wasn't a CIA agent, convinced CIA agents he wasn't a Castro sympathizer, convinced his wife he really was lost for 12 days, and convinced himself that it all really happened.

In From North

When he did get here—he came in from the north, from Jackson, Mich.

And his wife wasn't here to meet him.

"That's how it all got started," grinned Burns, 43, a bronzed, mustachioed man.

"I was going to meet my wife here, and we were going to settle down in Houston. I was in Puerto Rico at the time—last Feb. 15—and she was in Syracuse."

Burns was in the outdoor amusements business in San Juan, and planned to enter that business here. He had a battered Taylorcraft that he intended to fly to Houston—via Port-au-Prince, Montego Bay, Grand Cayman, and Key West.

No Instruments

"I had no instruments," he recalled. "When I left Montego Bay, bound for Grand Cayman, the Weather Bureau told me there was no extraordinary weather."

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TREVOR BURNS

He Finally Made It

If not, then line squalls, haze, and poor visibility is normal for Grand Cayman, because that's what Burns ran into.

"I couldn't find it, it's just a speck, so I pointed her north and hoped I'd hit one of the little Caymans. I didn't—I ran out of gas 85 miles off the Cuban coast, and ditched."

Burns figured he was a goner, for he had nothing but a Mae West lifejacket, but he didn't quit.

"I figured it was the end, but I thought I'd swim awhile," he grinned. "I hadn't been swimming for 10 minutes when the first shark started circling me."

The biggest was 13 feet

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long, I estimated. I knew I was a goner, but I sure didn't want to go that way."

He struck at the sharks with a small pocket knife, but fortunately drew no blood.

"I would really have been torn up, had I," he said, shaking his head. "I finally drove them off by blowing air out through my lips, with my head under water. Sort of a Bronx cheer."

In all, in the next 28 hours, he drove off seven big sharks. Finally, exhausted, he pulled himself up on a coral reef, where, the next day, a Cuban patrol boat crew rescued him.

"What To Do"

The seamen gave him first aid for exposure and the coral cuts, and took him to Cienfuegos, where he was questioned by Cuban officers off a "Russian-built torpedo boat and a Russian-type destroyer."

"They had me, but they didn't know what to do with me," Burns said. "They finally decided to use me for propaganda purposes: You know, show the world how generous they could be to a poor cast-up American."

The Castro officials took him to Havana in a plush private plane, and put him in a plush suite at the Habana Libre. He was examined by Dr. Jose Marcos, Castro's personal physician.

"They wanted me to meet Castro himself, but I declined," said Burns.

The Cubans took him on "Conducted tours," he said, and

invited and dined him at fashionable restaurants.

"Now," he was told.